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CIA 'must be watched,' Woodward warns here

By Don Terry P 18

The Central Intelligence Agency can be a powerful tool of U.S. policy or an out-of-control locomotive—either way it must "always be watched," journalist Bob Woodward said Monday.

"The CIA can go off the tracks," Woodward said during a visit to

Chicago to promote his new book on the agency. "It went off the tracks in the '70s and '80s. The CIA is supposed to prevent wars, not start them."

During the reign of the late William Casey, "probably the most powerful CIA director in history," the agency was derailing around the globe, Woodward said.

"Casey casts a giant shadow over the world," Woodward said. "Casey was a prime backer of the Iran arms sale, which we now see coming home to roost. . . . His legacy was basically negative."

Woodward spent four years writing a book on the agency and Casey called *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987*.

The Washington Post editor and Wheaton native described Casey Monday as "the last buccaneer."

"Casey believed in action and taking risks," Woodward said. "He was a great risk taker. He had a blueprint for the world."

Casey's blueprint has done a lot of damage, Woodward said. The contra war in Nicaragua—where thousands of civilians have been killed—was Casey's war, and many of the violent troubles in the Middle East can be traced back to CIA misdeeds, he said.

But Woodward's view of Casey is not entirely negative. He said there's much to respect about the late director. Woodward said he conducted more than four dozen interviews with Casey and considered him "the most interesting man in the Reagan administration."

Casey, an intelligence officer in World War II, brought an intellectual breadth and energy to the job often lacking in the past, he said. And Casey helped improve the CIA's image from that of a combat-shy collection of paper pushers to an agency of action.

But he went too far, for he broke the law, Woodward said.

Veil is 500 pages long, but most discussions about the book have ignored the first 498 pages and focused on its controversial ending—Woodward's last interview with Casey in the hospital room of the gravely ill director.

Woodward, 44, said he had to have help getting past the CIA guards and into Casey's room. He refused to provide any details. During that interview, Casey admitted with a nod and a few words before he fell asleep, that he knew about the diversion of Iranian arms sales money to the contras, Woodward wrote in the book.